

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02

OMB-01 (ISO) W

----- 092771

O R 230743Z AUG 76

FM AMCONSUL UDORN

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 7890

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 5859

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJECT: ANTI-VIETNAMESE DEMONSTRATIONS IN NORTHEAST

1. NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN REPORTING SERIES OF PROTEST RALLIES AGAINST VIETNAMESE RESIDENTS IN SAKHON NAKHON AND NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCES IN NORTHEAST DURKG PAST FOUR WEEKS WHICH HAVE LED TO DESTRUCTION, LOOTING, AND DAMAGE OF APPROXIMATELY 250 VIETNAMESE OWNED SHOPS AND HOMES. ANTI-VIETNAMESE DEMONSTRATIONS BEGAN JULY 21-25 IN THAT PHANOM DISTRICT, NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCE ON EVE OF FOR MIN PHICHA'S TRIP TO VIENTIANE AND HANOI AND HAVE CONTINUED INTERMITTENTLY THROUGH THIS PAST WEEKEND. ESTIMATED TOTAL DAMAGE IS IN EXCESS OF 20 MILLION BAHT (20 BAHT EQUAL TO ONE US DOLLAR). NO LOSS OF LIFE HAS BEEN REPORTED, ALTHOUGH 10 PERSONS WERE REPORTEDLY WOUNDED, MANY SERIOUSLY, WHEN A BOMB WAS THROWN INTO A LARGE GROUP OF MARCHING ANTI-VIETNAMESE DEMONSTRATORS IN MUKDAHAN DISTRICT TOWN, NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCE AUGUST 18.

2. OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF ANTI-VIETNAMESE PROTESTORS HAVE BEEN SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL STUDENTS WELL ORGANIZED AND EQUIPPED (I.E. NEW LOOKING LAND ROVER VEHICLES WITH POWERFUL SOUND EQUIPMENT). THEY HAVE DENOUNCED CONTINUED PRESENCES OF VIETNAMESE IN NORTHEAST AND DEMANDED THAT AUTHORITIES TAKE PROMPT ACTION TO EFFECT THEIR REMOVAL. POLICE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO RESTRAIN PROTESTORS WITH LIMITED

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SUCCESS AND USUALLY ONLY AFTER EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO VIETNAMESE

PROPERTY HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE.

3. ACTS OF INTIMIDATION AGAINST VIETNAMESE MINORITY HAVE OCCURRED PERIODICALLY IN NORTHEAST AS RESULT OF PERSISTING HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ANTAGONISMS BETWEEN THAI AND VIETNAMESE, THAI RESENTMENT OF SHARP BUSINESS PRACTICES AND SUPERIOR COMMERCIAL SKILLS OF VIETNAMESE AND WIDE SPREAD CONVICTION AMONG THAIS THAT VIETNAMESE ARE A SECURITY THREAT TO THAILAND BECAUSE OF THEIR ALLEGED LOYALTY TO HO CHI MINH AND SUPPOSED LINKS WITH THAI COMMUNIST INSURGENTS. THESE TRADITIONAL BASES OF ANIMOSITY TOWARDS VIETNAMESE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INTENSIFIED BY A FEELING OF UNEASE AMONG MANY POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS IN NORTHEAST OVER HANOI'S RECENT EMERGENCE AS A FORMIDABLE REGIONAL POWER.

4. NOTEWORTHY ASPECT OF CURRENT SERIES OF OUTBREAKS AGAINST VIETNAMESE ARE, IN ADDITION TO RATHER EXTENSIVE AMOUNT OF DESTRUCTION THEY HAVE PRODUCED, INDICATIONS SUGGESTING THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

EITHER ON THEIR OWN AUTHORITY OR AT BEHEST OF SOME ELEMENTS OF RTG, MAY HAVE HAD A ROLE IN ORGANIZING SOME DEMONSTRATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, ISOC INTELLIGENCE CHIEF IN NAKHON PHANOM MADE CLEAR TO CONSUL IN INTERVIEW AUGUST 20 THAT HE EXERTS CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE WITH STUDENT PROTESTORS THAT SPARKED VIOLENT RIOTING AGAINST VIETNAMESE IN MUKDAHAN DISTRICT AUGUST 17-18. HE SAID THAT PROVINCE OFFICIALS SENT HIM TO PERSUADE STUDENTS TO STOP RAMPAGE AGAINST VIETNAMESE WHOM HE SAID HE PROFOUNDLY DISLIKES. ALSO CHAT THAI MP FROM NAKHON PHANOM STATED FRANKLY TO REPORTING OFFICER THAT "HIGHER AUTHORITIES" WERE CONNECTED WITH FOUR DAYS OF ANTI-VIETNAMESE RALLIES IN SAKHON NAKHON PROVINCE AUGUST 17-20.

5. IN THIS REGARD NEWSPAPER THAI RAT AUGUST 18 IDENTIFIES UNSUCCESSFUL CHAT THAI CANDIDATE FOR MP PRAYOON SRI-ART AS PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT BEHIND ANTI-VIETNAMESE ACTIVITIES IN SAKHON NAKHON WHICH HAVE INCLUDED, AMONG OTHER VIOLENT ACTS, A FIRE AUGUST 11 IN PROVINCE CAPITAL THAT TOTALLY DESTROYED A FOUR BLOCK AREA IN MAIN BUSINESS SECTOR OF VIETNAMESE AND CHINESE COMMUNITIES LEAVING AN ESTIMATED 1000 PEOPLE HOMELESS. NATION AUGUST 21 QUOTES DEPUTY EDUCATION MINISTER DABCHAI AKKARACK, WHO IS CHAT THAI MP FROM SAKHON NAKHON, AS PROMPTLY ENDORSING FELLOW PARTY MEMBER PRAYOON'S PUBLIC

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DEMAND AUGUST 20 THAT GOVERNMENT REMHGVE VIETNAMESE RESIDENTS FROM SAKHON NAKHON TOWNSHIP AND PLACE THEM IN REFUGEE CAMP.

6. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER LOCAL OFFICIALS MAY OR MAY NOT BE INVOLVED IN CURRENT ANTI-VIETNAMESE MOVEMENT IT APPEARS TO CONSUL, BASED ON INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED DURING TRIP TO FIVE MAJOR PROVINCES LAST WEEK, THAT ANIMOSITY TOWARDS VIETNAMESE IS ON INCREASE ON ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY IN NORTHEAST. WHILE THIS IN PART MAY BE POLITICALLY

MOTIVATED BY ELEMENTS DISENCHANTED WITH SENI GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO NORMALIZING RELATIONS WITH VIENTIANE AND HANOI, IT RESTS FUNDAMENTALLY ON WIDESPREAD CONVICTION AMONG POPULATION THAT VIETNAMESE HAVE LONG OVERSTAYED THEIR WELCOME IN THAILAND AND WITH END OF VIETNAM WAR SHOULD BE REPATRIATED TO THEIR NATIVE SOIL.

7. INDICATIONS ARE THAT ACTIVITIES DIRECTED AGAINST VIETNAMESE WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE UNTIL GOVERNMENT TAKES SOME ACTION IN RESPONSE TO PROTESTOR'S DEMANDS. UNLESS LOCAL AUTHORITIES EXHIBIT BETTER CONTROL OVER DEMONSTRATORS THAN THEY HAVE DONE THUS FAR, CHANCE OF REALLY SERIOUS VIOLENCE IS DEFINITE POSSIBILITY WITH POTENTIALLY DAMAGING CONSEQUENCES FOR SENI GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF RAPPROCHEMENT WITH HANOI.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: vogelfj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976UDORN05859
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760321-0858
From: UDORN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760827/aaaaaxou.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vogelfj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUN 2004 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <22 SEP 2004 by vogelfj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ANTI-VIETNAMESE DEMONSTRATIONS IN NORTHEAST
TAGS: PINT, PINS, TH, VS, LA
To: BANGKOK
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006